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CANCER OF LUNG, SMOKING LINKED

Two Experts Testify in Texas Widow's Suit

Two experts testified Friday in federal court that they believe that there is a relationship between cigarette smoking and cancer of the lung.

They were called to the stand during the fifth day of the trial in which a Houston, Tex., widow is suing two cigarette companies. She claims that her husband's death in 1955 from lung cancer was caused by his smoking.

Before the two new witnesses were called to the stand by the plaintiff's attorneys, defense counsel completed cross examination of Dr. Alton Ochsner. Dr. Ochsner had testified all day Thursday and told the court that he has concluded that there is a definite causal relationship between smoking and lung cancer.

Dr. Richard H. Overholt, head of the Overholt Thoracic Clinic in Boston, Mass., testified on direct examination Friday that he is afraid that lung cancer will decimate the population.

He also told the jury that cigarette smokers stand a 97 per cent chance of getting lung cancer. And he said that if the plaintiff's husband "had been fortunate enough never to have smoked he would not have had the cancer from which he died."

Dr. George Moore, director of the Roswell Park Memorial Institute in Buffalo, N. Y., said: "It is beyond reasonable doubt that long, heavy smoking will result in cancer of the lung."

2048 LUNG CANCER CASES OBSERVED

Dr. Overholt, under questioning by H. Alva Brumfield, one of the plaintiff's attorneys, said that he first became interested in lung cancer in the late 1920s when he was a student of the inventor of the bronchoscope. He said that he was the first person to remove a lung in a 1933 operation.

He testified that he has seen or supervised 2048 lung cancer cases and of 60 or 70 per cent of these that have been operated on he has performed 47 per cent of the surgery.

Dr. Overholt said that there is a marked difference in the appearance in the bronchial tubes of smokers and non-smokers and he first suspected a link in smoking and cancer in 1939 when he noticed "something happening" to the linings of the air tubes of smokers. It was at that time that he gave up smoking himself, he asserted.

The witness told the court that he cannot explain why all smokers do not get cancer of the lung, "but they may get it if they live long enough."

He said that he feels that this can possibly be explained by the fact that only small percentages of persons exposed to other diseases such as tuberculosis and infantile paralysis ever get those diseases. "We can't say why some get it and others don't," he added.

Smokers do not get skin cancer from the contact of the tobacco with their fingers because of the difference in the type of tissue structure in the skin and in the lining of the lungs.

FEARS POPULATION MAY BE DECIMATED

Dr. Overholt testified that it takes long periods of chronic irritation to cause the tissue cells to "go berserk, multiply and cause trouble."

He added, "If you people had seen as many people suffocating with lung cancer as I have, you would understand why I am here. I am afraid it is going to decimate our population."

Asked by Brumfield if there is any mystery to cancer, the witness replied: "There is a mystery to life and a mystery to what changes a normal cell to a cancer cell, but there is no mystery about the relationship between smoking and cancer.

"I am of the opinion that if a person smokes over a long period of time there is a great likelihood that he will get cancer."

DOCTORS CROSS-EXAMINED

He said that he had read the history of the plaintiff's husband and had interviewed the plaintiff about his smoking habits and from that he formed the opinion that his cancer was caused by smoking.

On cross examination by Theodore Kiendl, a defense attorney, Dr. Overholt admitted that if he ruled out all of the other facts in the deceased man's history except the two factors of smoking and cancer he would still come to the same conclusion.

He testified that if the deceased had worked with radioactive materials or was exposed to chromates he would consider these two other possibilities for the cause of his cancer.

The doctor told Kiendl that most doctors who disagree with his opinion are smokers.

He referred to "strong circumstantial evidence that incriminates the person who is guilty—the smoker," but later, when questioned by the defense attorney about the word "circumstantial," he said "To me the evidence is so overwhelmingly positive I do not want to use the word."

PRODUCING CANCER IN MICE DESCRIBED

Dr. Moore described the Roswell Park Memorial Institute as the second largest cancer center in the world devoted to research and treatment.

He described research in which cancer is produced in mice "pretty much at will" and with the same compounds that produce cancer in humans.

The doctor also described methods used to extract the nicotine and tar from cigarettes through the use of smoking machines. He said that a number of cancer producing compounds have been found in the tar and others are still being found.

Before the tar, is applied to the mice, he said, it must be separated from the nicotine because the nicotine is so toxic in itself that the mice would be killed before the cancer could be produced.

OCHSNER 'FRIGHTENED'

Other witnesses during the trial, however, have testified that nicotine has no relationship to cancer of the lung.

Dr. Moore said that of 8000 persons involved in a study of the problem, there was a high incidence of lung cancer among smokers.

During the conclusion of his cross examination, Dr. Ochsner said that he has been "frightened" about the increase in lung cancer for many years.

Asked by Kiendl if there would not be a parallel between the incidence of cancer of the larynx and lung cancer if lung cancer was due to smoking, Dr. Ochsner said that he believes there is such a parallel from his clinical experience.

RESEARCH ADVANCE CHANGES OPINION

Kiendl sought to show that certain statistics do not bear out this opinion and Dr. Ochsner said "I'll tell you why. They are easily cured, most persons are cured. I maintain the incidence is increasing."

The witness claimed that statistics produced by the defense attorney were based on mortality and had nothing to do with the incidence of larynx cancer. Kiendl showed the doctor Charity hospital statistics from 1937 to 1947 which were not based on mortalities.

"There is probably an explanation for that," Dr. Ochsner asserted. "Pre-cancerous conditions in the larynx can be easily detected and prevented by early diagnosis and the stopping of the smoking."

Questioned on the incidence of lung cancer in males and females, the witness said that at first he thought there was some sexual predisposition in males and made many such statements but later changed his opinion as research advanced.

"I have seen some persons develop cancer of the lung after six years of smoking, some after many years. Generally a pack a day for 20 or 25 years in the male is the time needed to produce a malignancy," he asserted.

HIGHER INCIDENCE IN N.O.

Dr. Ochsner denied being biased when he was accused of it by Kiendl. "I am not biased. I am just an advocate of health," he said. "I am worried about the things that are happening to the people I have to take care of."

On the subject of air pollution and its possible relationship to lung cancer, Dr. Ochsner said that he has concluded that it plays no role. He said that he studied statistics from Pittsburgh, Pa., and New Orleans and found that New Orleans has a much higher incidence of lung cancer.

"Do you know that the downtown area of Pittsburgh, a highly industrialized area, has an excessively high incidence?" Kiendl asked.

Not as high as New Orleans, the doctor replied.

The cigarette suit has been brought by Mrs. Victoria St. Pierre Lartigue, formerly a resident of Franklin, against the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and the Liggett and Myers Tobacco Company for the death of her husband, Frank J. Lartigue.

The trial will be resumed at 10 a. m. Monday before Judge Herbert W. Christenberry.

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